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INFO RUEHBH/AMEMBASSY NASSAU  
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO  
RUEHKG/AMEMBASSY KINGSTON  
RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE  
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN  
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RUEHWN/AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

UNCLAS SANTO DOMINGO 001358

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SUBJECT: SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IS BEING MADE IN REFORMING THE  
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC'S PRISON SYSTEM

¶1. Summary: A/DCM and Poloff attended the inauguration of the Dominican Republic's twelfth model Correctional and Rehabilitation Center (CRC) in Moca on 11/5/2009. According to the Attorney General's Office, there are roughly 19,000 prisoners and detainees in 35 prisons across the country, with an intended capacity of 10,000 prisoners. The twelve CRCs hold approximately 3,000 of these prisoners, while conventional prisons contain the rest. The Attorney General has made prison reform one of his top priorities and significant progress is being made in improving prison conditions and rehabilitation efforts for those incarcerated in one of the new CRC's. End Summary.

¶2. President Leonel Fernandez, First Lady Margarita Ceden de Fernandez, Attorney General Radhames Jimenez Perez, Prison Director Manuel de Jesus Perez Sanchez, and National Police Chief Rafael Guzman Fermin headed the Government of the Dominican Republic (GoDR) delegation attending the inauguration. Following the ceremonies, A/DCM and Poloff joined a tour with President Fernandez of the newest CRC. The compound contains six buildings that will hold the 1,200 prisoners, a cafeteria, a store, a barbershop, four workshops, and five security towers. The Attorney General's Office, which has responsibility for the prison system, has yet to announce the official date when the prison will start processing new prisoners.

¶3. With technical support and funding from the European Union, the CRCs, newly built or converted from older prison facilities, provide prisoners with improved living conditions and other amenities in comparison to the country's traditional prisons. At the CRCs, professionally trained civilian corrections officers have replaced the police and military officers employed in traditional prisons. The goal of these new "model prisons" is to improve the rehabilitation prospects of inmates through vocational training and other educational opportunities. Classes focus on literacy, English courses, information systems, and agricultural and industrial training.

¶4. To date, twelve CRCs have been built or converted, in Puerto Plata, Najayo, Santo Domingo, Dajabon, Santiago, Elias Pi????a, Mao, Monte Plata, San Francisco de Macoris, San Pedro de Macoris, and now Moca. The total cost of the prison project in Moca was 300 million pesos (\$8.3M USD), and it was completed in six months.

¶5. COMMENT: The GoDR is dedicating significant effort and

resources to the improvement of prison conditions. The CRCs currently house about 16 percent of the total inmate population, a percentage that continues to increase as more model facilities are opened. According to the Attorney General's Office, five CRCs are currently being developed in Higuey, La Romana, Salcedo, San Juan de la Maguana and Bani. Meanwhile, prison conditions for the remaining 84 percent remain dismal, with chronic overcrowding (the largest prison, La Victoria, built for 1,300 inmates now houses over 4,000), dilapidated facilities, inadequate resources, widespread corruption among military and police guards, and with criminal gangs in effective control of many facilities.

Lambert